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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NICOSIA 000992

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SUBJECT: CYPRUS: BARROSO TO TALAT - "CONCENTRATE ON THE NEGOTIATIONS"

REF: USEU TODAY (12-17-08)

Classified By: Ambassador Frank C. Urbancic, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Turkish Cypriot Leader Mehmet Ali Talat's December 9-11 visit to Brussels was not particularly productive, according to two Turkish Cypriot (T/C) contacts who accompanied him. European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso largely had turned a deaf ear to T/C entreaties for equal treatment and better access to Commission officials and rejected Talat's call that the EU encourage the Greek Cypriots to speed up the ongoing UN-brokered settlement process in Cyprus. Barroso did, however, promise the T/C leader "an open door in Brussels." Meetings with British FM Miliband and Combined Foreign and Security Policy High Representative Javier Solana were cordial, if equally inconclusive. Talat reportedly failed to engage Miliband in a detailed discussion of the Cyprus Problem, while Solana was largely in listening mode throughout their short meeting. The visit to Brussels allowed Talat to show the "TRNC flag," but seemingly did little more to further T/Cs' cause. Additionally, it likely reinforced the Turkish Cypriot belief that the European Union cannot be an honest broker on Cyprus, owing to "Greek Cypriot" membership in the exclusive club. End Summary

Barroso: "Concentrate on the negotiations"

¶2. (C) Turkish Cypriot Leader Mehmet Ali Talat was unable to achieve his main goals for the December 9-11 visit to Brussels, according to two Turkish Cypriot contacts who participated in the visit. Talat had hoped to make progress on three main issues: increasing institutional communication between the EU and Turkish Cypriots, securing equal treatment for the Turkish Cypriots in the context of the ongoing UN-auspices peace process, and convincing the Commission to "encourage" Greek Cypriots to speed up the pace of negotiations.

¶3. (C) Asim Akansoy, Talat's chief of staff, complained to Poloff on December 15 that European Commission President Barroso did not seriously address T/C concerns regarding the lack of communication with the Commission. Barroso had brushed off Talat's concern that European Commissioners rarely visited the north or, when they did, avoided or limited meetings with T/C officials. "He told us it was 'nothing,' and that we should concentrate on negotiations," Akansoy complained. Barroso did, however, tell Talat to "call on him in Brussels" and that he (Barroso) would engage both Talat and Christofias, should settlement talks stall. (Note: EU Commissioners rarely go to the north, owing to pressures from the RoC government. Commissioner for Social Affairs Vladimir Spidla visited the island in early December. His only time north of the Green Line was spent visiting the EU Program Assistance Office in north Nicosia, and he would only meet Talat there -- as opposed to in Talat's office.

Even in Brussels, contact between Commission officials and T/Cs is limited; in December 2007, Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn at the last meeting even canceled a meeting with "TRNC PM" Ferdi Soyer, citing scheduling conflicts.)

¶4. (C) Erhan Erchin, head of the "TRNC EU Coordination Center" and a key Commission contact in the north, told Embassy officers on December 17 that Olli Rehn had "lost contact with us and was confused." The Turkish Cypriots were thus disappointed that they were unable to secure commitment from Brussels to increase Rehn's contacts with T/Cs, for example by engaging T/C negotiator Ozdil Nami. (Note: In a November 26 meeting with the Ambassador, Andrew Rasbash, the T/C Unit Chief in the Enlargement Directorate, said that Nami should visit Brussels more frequently. Nami's desire for meetings at the Commissioner-level was a "stumbling block," Rasbash added. End Note).

¶5. (C) Erchin told us that Talat had stressed to Barroso his commitment to a federal solution for Cyprus and had urged the Commission to provide equal treatment to the Turkish Cypriots in the context of the present UN settlement process. Erchin said that Barroso did not understand the equality-between-the-communities concept, which was enshrined in the UN-brokered process, and "freaked out," noting that Cyprus was an EU member state. Talat's plea for the Commission to "encourage" the Greek Cypriots to engage more constructively, namely to speed up the process by increasing the frequency of meetings, went nowhere, Erchin reported. Akansoy claimed that Barroso was not well-informed on the negotiations, while expert Rehn sat silent during the meeting.

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Miliband: "You have to negotiate with Christofias"

¶6. (C) Talat's other principal meetings were equally inconclusive and unsatisfying to T/Cs. UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband was friendly but refused to go into detail on Cyprus process-related issues, Akansoy revealed, and repeatedly told Talat he must "negotiate with Christofias" ("...and not with us" was implicit in Akansoy's recounting). Regarding the meeting with Solana, Akansoy said the CFSP High Representative mainly sat and listened. Erchin said that Talat and Solana were "old comrades" -- both shared a Socialist past -- and that the T/C leader's true goal was to influence the Spaniard before his planned meeting with ROC President Demetris Christofias the following day.

Comment

¶7. (C) Talat's latest visit to Brussels did little to change his already jaded view of the European Union as a stooge of the G/Cs. As one of our contacts put it, "we have no expectations left for Brussels." Talat's call for the Commission to "encourage" the Greek Cypriots to engage more actively in the settlement process was a long-shot at best, and seemingly went against Talat's own policy of restricting EU involvement -- because of a perceived pro-G/C slant -- to technical assistance on harmonization with the Acquis and financial aid. We concur with him, however, regarding the need for increased contacts between Turkish Cypriots and the Commission, as well as with resident diplomatic missions of EU member states. There could be great potential value in a visit from Olli Rehn (Ref), but it appears increasingly unlikely that Rehn will meet with a wide-spectrum of Turkish Cypriots or see Talat in his "office" as the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community. Without that, the T/Cs will continue to discount the value of the EU at an increasing rate.

Urbancic